

Energy Generation and Efficiency

CASE STUDY

American Hmong farmers in the Ozarks who purchased outdated poultry operations face high energy costs and struggle to meet performance goals set by their integrators. Their difficulties as new farmers are exacerbated by cultural differences and language barriers that hinder access to USDA services available to help.

A 3-year NIFA Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development grant to improve energy efficiency and farm sustainability provided a springboard for other USDA agencies to formulate a collaborative approach to address the problems of 400 farmers in the region to ensure their long-term viability, and achieve positive environmental outcomes. Within the first 3 months of the grant, NRCS, RD, and FSA State leaders and technical staff participated in five meetings and workshops coordinated by the Hmong National Development, Inc., and their partner, EnSave, Inc., to strengthen support for the Hmong community.

Based on detailed energy audits completed for the first round of Hmong farmers, NRCS EQIP financial resources have been approved to implement facility improvements that will achieve more than 35 percent savings of fuel and electricity use when installed and reduce annual GHG emissions. These facility upgrades will increase production efficiency, resulting in a better financial bottom line.

Over the next few months, Hmong farmers will be helped to diversify their operations using RD grants and FSA loans to expand production of specialty crops and renewable energy and biofuels opportunities of their farms.



Poultry farmer Kao Her houses 235,000 broiler chickens in 6 poultry houses in Noel, MO. Photo courtesy of USDA NRCS.

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USDA agencies are finding creative ways to amplify their assistance for the Hmong by increasing technical assistance through agreements with energy businesses, providing translation services with the help of nonprofit organizations, and expanding recruitment in the Hmong community for agency interns. Expected overall project outcomes include:

- A more vibrant rural community;
- Stimulus for rural businesses providing support green-energy services to agricultural customers;
- Improvement of livestock health and farm biosecurity through improvement of confined feeding operation facilities;
- Increased opportunities to engage farmers as resource stewards;
- Reduction of inherent program barriers by increasing agency interaction and cross-promotion of USDA programs;
- Stronger transparency and coordination of agency funding decisions; and
- A model that can be applied to other USDA initiatives.